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AUTHOR Vavrek, Bernard
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to consider the nature of small and rural public libraries in the United States in the light of the existing opportunities that they provide for adult lifelong learning, and to ponder the future of collaborative services. The role of the public library is explored in relation to lifelong learning, and rural libraries are defined and discussed. The following planning considerations are presented: (1) library financing; (2) the conservative nature of rural and small towns; (3) a lack of academically trained staff in America's libraries; (4) trustee development; (5) the fact that the typical rural pubic library has probably not conducted any form of community or user survey; (6) not withstanding the age of electronic access to information through a variety of networks, the typical rural library is perceived by its public as primarily a place of books; (7) females outnumber male library users; (8) the implications of technology for those responsible for future planning; and (9) providing library and information services to Native Americans. An eight-item research agenda, listed in order of importance, for Federal action is suggested. (Contains 46 references.) (MAS)

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"Rural and Small Libraries: Providers for Lifelong Learning"

Bernard Vavrek

Clarion University of Pennsylvania

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to consider the nature of rural and small public libraries in the United States in the light of present and existing opportunities that they provide for adult lifelong learning, and to ponder the future of collaborative services. Until recently, small libraries have been ignored as models of service. Probably because rural communities, in general, have been neglected units of study (Fitchen, 1991; Cigler, 1994). This minimization of nonmetropolitan (a term synonymous with rural) libraries is surprising when one understands that the vast majority of these public institutions are located in the countryside. As America has attempted to adjust from an agricultural to industrial infrastructure, it is now confronted with a new sociological challenge--dealing with a society predicated on information access and use. The singularly important question, which cannot be begged, is how does the public library fit in, if at all? And what is its role in the future of rural America, where daily information needs exist and must be met?

Limitations

The limitations of this paper should be noted as well. While the role of the public library is explored in relation to adult lifelong learning, it does not consider the manner in which adults learn, which is a complex field of investigation in itself. "Adult education is a field of study and educational practice whose scope and significance are poorly understood" (Alkin, 1992, p. 30). Allen Tough's (1979)

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review of research on adult education reveals, for example, a study of rural adult learners whose main interest is job related, but who needed help in setting goals and finding information and materials. In another investigation, public library respondents were asked where they preferred to learn. Most chose the home--the public library was ranked sixth out of seven (Tough, 1979, p. 174-175).

So in evaluating the present and future role of lifelong learning in the public library, reviewers must be aware of the dynamics of adult learning that take place in a society of an increasing number of alternatives. Because of the lack of research on this topic, it would be very important to understand the perceptions that adults have about the public library in relation to it as a resource for lifelong continuing education.

Defining Rural

While statistically describing rural America as a place comprising 2,288 counties, containing 83% of the nation's land, and home to 21% of the population (51 million) is not a problem (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], p. 2, 1995), defining a "rural model" is more of a challenge. The United States Bureau of the Census does it by indicating that a place of at least 2,500 people denotes an urban area, and, therefore, really doesn't define a rural space. Other sources contend, for example, that only the people who have lived in a rural area for some time talk about "rural." Another group that is fond of "rural" is the academic researcher. Increasingly, one will encounter the term "country" used in place of "rural," as, "One lives in the country." This approach also helps to dispel the possibility of "rural"

being interpreted as a pejorative term.

In 1978, the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship [CSRL], at Clarion University of Pennsylvania, added to the dimensions of the rural metaphor by including populations up to 25,000 in its studies--in addition to the nondefinition provided by the Census folks. This action was taken because of feeling that <2500 was too restrictive and would have excluded places such as Clarion, a population of about 6000 individuals, that while defined by the federal government as urban, easily fits into a rural model.

In the late 1980's, the CSRL started to use the concepts of "small" and "rural" synonymously for a variety of reasons. First, as rural communities continue to change and are encroached upon by urbanizing influences, it is increasingly difficult to discern differences between models. Parenthetically, it should be noted that for research purposes as well as for the discussion of this paper, the libraries (rural or small) being discussed are independent community libraries as opposed to, for example, the branches of a larger library system. Second, the federal government is increasingly using "rural" and "nonmetro" to be the same thing, further enlarging the model (USDA, 1995, p. 25) The third reason for using the terms "rural" and "small" to mean the same thing developed out a conference engagement for this author in New Jersey. It was the author's impression that one was to talk about rural library services until the conference coordinator indicated that those in attendance really represented "small" libraries and not rural ones. The implication was, of course, that in the nation's most urbanized state the chance of seeing a cow out of the library

window was remote. Incidentally, the possibility of getting a glimpse of farm animals from any window of a small or rural library is also slim in that the United States has long since passed from being an agricultural economy. "Today, only about 5 million people, less than 10 percent of the rural population, live on farms" (USDA, 1995, p.4). Parenthetically, it is interesting to note that 53% of employed farm residents work in nonagricultural industries, and 73% of employed women who live on farms do not work in farming (Dortch, 1994). But back at the conference, this author hastily corrected notes and simply excluded references to "rural" and substituted "small." It reinforced the fact that some individuals, and not only in Jersey, viewed rural as a negative term. It further solidified the notion that issues and services pertaining to rural libraries were the same as those confronting librarians in small libraries. For students of rural America, communities may be usefully divided into the following types: industrial, ranch, resort, retirement (Glasgow, 1991), manufacturing, agricultural, college/university, mining, and the seat of government (Raftery, 1986). But categories disintegrate into complex socioeconomic issues that sometime hide the realities of life on the farm, poverty, abuse, low educational attainment, malnourishment, and the absence of medical practitioners (Horwitz, 1993; Weinstein, 1994), etc. Unfortunately, an idyllic, romantic view of "life in the country" has sometimes been both an hindrance and counterproductive to finding practical solutions for problems. While an increasing number of Americans perceive rural as encompassing the good life, and in many places it does, at the same time it also obscures the conflicts between established rural types who see no need for new

roads and schools in the face of population growth, and the "come-heres" (as the new rural folks in Virginia are affectionately known) who look in vain for the local deli (which rather may have a name such as Lander's Big Store) and wonder why the public library has neither a computer nor online database searching available (Rimer, 1993). It also frequently raises conflicts between the new rural people (transplanted urbanites) who like the overall sense of bucolic America just as it is, thank you--it is afterall what they have sought, and the established population who sees needful jobs being created by building prisons, incinerators/land fills, and casinos (Fitchen, 1991; Clines, 1993; Hinds, 1993; Terry, 1993). There are any number of anecdotal illusions that one may use to characterize the country. A colleague recently told this author of visiting a small community where it seemed that drivers never used their turn signals. When he/she inquired why this was the case, the response was that "everyone knows where everyone else is going." Those who live in rural America or are students of this environment would like it to be the one nostalgically viewed by the humorist Garrison Keillor at his fictional Lake Wobegon Minnesota, "Where all the women are strong, the men are good looking, and the children are above average" (Karlen, 1994, p. 39). Sadly, rural America is also a place where people live in discarded cars and buses, where women and children are abused, and an increasing number also live below the poverty line.

> As local residents of almost all communities have become increasingly dependent on the larger society for meeting many daily needs, and as the ability of local institutions and

> groups in rural areas to hold the commitments of residents has declined, physical isolation has become more closely associated with social isolation than with social cohesion (Wilkinson, 1992, p. 11).

It is also a place where recently a 2 year old child was allegedly beaten by his/her father into a comatose state and a member of the local church committed suicide because of being distraught over his/her job. Life in the country has become less tranquil.

Rural Libraries

To discuss public librarianship in the United States is to realize the fact that 80% (7,118) of these institutions are located in population centers serving up to 25,000 people. Of this 80%, three out of ten libraries (2,656) may be found providing services in places up to 2,500 individuals (Chute, 1994, p. 25). The majority of rural libraries (<2500 people) are staffed by one full-time person, have a collection of fewer than 10,000 books and serial volumes, and operate within a total budget of $21,000 (Chute, 1994, pp. 33, 61, 37). This situation prompted at least one author to write about the "genteel poverty" of the library (Baldwin, 1993). For emphasis, this author would like to point out "total budget" referred to previously, means exactly that. It represents funds available for everything from paying the utilities to staff salaries. This is unlike a situation in a school library, for example, where salary costs come from a line item in the school's budget for personnel, and the librarian's allocation is primarily for materials. Parenthetically, some rural libraries in the United States have no line item in their budgets for book purchases.

In these instances, a variety of different means are used to raise funds, including donations for memorials--for those who are deceased, or living memorials in recognition of someone in the town. Rural libraries have been using the latter approach also as a means of obtaining children's books donated by the kids themselves. In comparison to the basic model of rural (<2,500), in service populations up to 25,000, the typical public library has from two to four full-time staff persons available, the book and serial volume collection numbers 24,000, and the total operating budget is $117,000. While an improvement over the conditions facing smaller libraries, one will recognize that these are not luxurious factors of support (Chute, 1994, pp. 33, 61, 37).

Planning Considerations

As decision makers contemplate avenues for lifelong learning at the community level, the following selected comments about rural library services, in general, may be of some value:

First, if one were to conduct a survey among those responsible for the management of the community library and to inquire about the most pressing issues facing those individuals, there is little doubt that library financing would lead the list. Overall, throughout the country, financial support for public libraries is a relative matter, with some communities being able to provide a decent working budget for services and activities, while others are struggling. Per capita expenditures (determined on a state basis) range, for example, from a high of over $30 to a low of seven dollars (Chute, 1994, pp. 70-71). There is sharp concern about the future,

however. Accelerating the always poignant issue of library financing is not only the continuing costs of doing business on an everyday business (along with acquiring new technology), but wondering what imminent cuts in the federal budget--particularly in relation to the Library Services and Construction Act [LSCA], will bring. While 80% of the community's library budget comes from local sources (with property taxes in the lead), cuts in LSCA funding will effect future library programming, cooperative efforts, and a diminution of services provided through state library agencies--among other things. It should not be a surprise to any reader that taxpayers--at all levels--are against raising assessment to pay for services. And perhaps not so ironically, these same individuals want institutional activities to remain at present levels. Community leader have had to be very flexible in attempting to raise sufficient funds to support the local library. Previously, for example, what may have been viewed as fund raisers (as phonothons) to enhance endowments or provide for special programming is now a built in factor for raising working capital to enable the library to function on a day-to-day basis. As a consequence of need, one may witness a wide-range of fund raising activities employed at the local level--everything from selling stationery to used books, wine and cheese parties, dances, and direct solicitations to local community groups such as the Rotary, Women's Club, etc. While these events may be productive, there must be people of good will motivated to assist the library in its "hour of need." Small and rural libraries may be in trouble in the future as there are fewer and fewer young adults available to act as volunteers and commit the enormous time that is required for the support of local institutions,

particularly the public library. Where there are no jobs, there will be no community.

At present, it is relatively easy to forecast future funding trends of rural and small public libraries. Those than can--will. Those that can't-- won't. The public library has always been a locally administered institution. This fact of life has been magnified as the federal government configures itself to assume less and less a role in traditional library services. At issue in this matter of financial support is an extremely important question. Who is responsible for the inadequate funding base for America's rural and small libraries? The answer has many parts. One facet that the library community does not like to address, however, is its general failure to articulate the public library's significance to an extent that opinion leaders are convinced of the public library's contribution to the community's well being. In addition to other services, for example, the public library is one of the best economic values around. In most places, this has not been emphasized. Because of a collective sense of historical inaction, rural and small public libraries now fight for the continuation of their institutional lives.

Second, rural and small towns are traditionally conservative institutions. They can be both unfriendly to outsiders and new ideas. From practical experience, for example, it appears to take about 15 years to become accepted as a "local." When the author first moved to Clarion, Pennsylvania, and a long time after that, the only way one could explain to boro officials that the alley (next to the author's house) had not been plowed of the snow

was to indicate that one was talking about the "Miller House" (the previous and long-time owner of the residence). As another example of this, amusing jokes are told about rural people giving directions by using landmarks that ceased to exist decades ago. Such as, "turn left where Dave Fowler's barn used to be." The refrain that "we never did it that way before" is not meant to be used as a global slur on community leaders in rural and small towns, but it is an attitude that is important to recognize. Its corollary is "show me," and one does not have to be in the great state of Missouri for this to be relevant. Unfortunately, the conservative approach to things may also be shared by library personnel and trustees/board members who see no reason to change the routines of life in their favorite place. Parenthetically, it may be of interest to note that the typical librarian has lived in his or her community for an average of 17 years and has been the librarian for ten years (Vavrek, 1989, p. 93). Sometimes this inflexibility exists because of individuals' lack of experience and education, which will be discussed shortly. Among other things, planning for the future will continue to be a challenge in places where people have really not thought much about the present library and its community role.

Third, in the view of this author, the most important factor limiting the present and future development of rural and small town information services is the lack of academically trained staff in America's libraries. Although this might appear to be a self-serving comment coming from someone who has spent many years as an educator, it is better understood in the context of the fact that only about 34% (3,452) of the full-time librarians in rural libraries (<25,000) have an American Library

Association's [ALA] master's degree, and in communities of (<2500) people the incidence is five percent (86) (Chute, 1994, p. 29). If one were to diagram the reasons for the educational situation cited above, they would include expressed attitudes such as: "we have never had a librarian with a 'university' degree before; why do we need one now?," and, "what's the matter with a salary of $13,000?" Additional reasons include: the relatively few schools of library and information science serving a geographically dispersed population; the inability of individuals to leave their positions to participate in classroom coursework; and the attitude of some staff persons who don't recognize that they have a need to pursue formalized education. Some of these problems are being assuaged by enterprising institutions that are aggressively offering long-distance educational opportunities to students either in person or via satellite/cable. Another resource to help the situation is LISDEC, the Library and Information Science Distance Education Consortium, which is in its developmental stages. This latter idea will enable students, who would matriculate into one school, become global consumers in that they would be able to enroll in any other library and information science program around the country through the Mind Extension University or some similar carrier. One would be able to stay at home and have library and information science courses delivered by cable television (Barron, 1991). The problems of providing avenues of education are, of course, not only limited to the formal, credit generating, degree awarding types. A crucial analog to this is continuing education. Presently, in addition to the schools of library and information science, library cooperatives, systems, and regional libraries, along with

state library agencies have been attempting to provide consumers with what they want and need. Unfortunately, there are too many library staff and trustees in need of CE, particularly pertaining to technology, than providers. And frequently there is little that is systematic about what is offered. Teleconferencing, for example, is an important and cost-effective way of providing new information, however, when the program fades the question is, "now where does that printer driver get installed?" And there may not be anyone available to provide the "hand holding" support that is needed. The issue of education is immensely significant as rural and small towns become virtual communities in the dimensions of cyberspace (Rheingold, 1993).. In addition to providing educational opportunities for library staff, in relation to technological expertise, it may be required for each community or combination of communities to provide their own administrator/technical person. This is the approach that the enterprising town of Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, has taken (Depo, 1991).

Fourth, in the view of this author, not only is trustee development key to future planning of any type, it is a topic waiting for action. State library agencies, for example, deserve considerable credit for their efforts in attempting to provide workshops and other educational modules for trustees. States such as Nebraska have gone further than most in establishing certification requirements for trustees to remain active (Nebraska Library Commission, 1992). At the same time, anecdotal information from trustees and librarians around the country suggest that quite often the "me vs them" mentality prevails. If libraries in rural communities are to prosper,

it can not be at the expense of attempting to roll-over trustees, who after all not only hire and fire the librarian but are responsible for the overall financial solvency of the library. It should not be the reverse, either. While it is a simple matter, clearly, the form of development needed to insure that the library plans for the future, uses its resources wisely in consort with other agencies, and becomes a true community information center, begins with a mutual working trust between library staff and trustees/directors. The author has been made more sensitive to these issues over the last ten years, since one's wife has been president of the board of the local public library.

Fifth, while one would like to believe that the situation is changing, planners must be aware of the fact that the typical rural public library has probably not conducted any form of community or user survey. Vavrek (1989) reported that only 22% (81) of the libraries investigated had conducted a community analysis over the last five years, and 23% (86) of the libraries had multi-year plans available. In the absence of statistical data describing the library's use and the attitude of clients toward available services, planning is done in an ad hoc manner, at best. Substituted for survey data, library personnel will use interpersonal methods of information gathering, following the impression that one is familiar with everyone in the community who uses the library. This approach obscures situations involving new people who have moved into the service area and certainly does not provide an opportunity to include those individuals who presently are not card carrying members of the library. While more comments on this matter will follow, present research

suggests that about half of the population of a typical rural community, utilizes the public library in some fashion. Clearly, those responsible for the development of rural and small libraries, must work to expand the overall number of people who are library "regulars." This is a key element in insuring that the local library provides a critical role. Presently, it is not perceived as accomplishing that.

Sixth, notwithstanding the age of electronic access to information through a variety of networks (Inter, Free, Use, LANs, WANs, RANs etc.), the typical rural library is perceived by its public as primarily a place of books. Despite the wide variety of resources available in the smallest library, user studies suggest that requests for bestsellers and leisure reading materials outstrip the demand for informational needs such as answering reference questions (Vavrek 1990; Estabrook 1991; Wittig 1991; Vavrek 1993). Historically, public library studies have typically exhibited these characteristics. The public library's symbolic connectivity with books is not difficult to discern. Books are linked directly to reading and literacy efforts (and those things aren't bad). Further, small libraries do not have the funds to support individualized public relations efforts. As a consequence, ALA generated "propaganda" abound, emphasizing the singularity of books. One will find an array of posters adorning the walls of the typical rural library, depicting personae from Sting to Oprah Winfrey, pitching reading through the ever popular medium of books. This author once asked an American Library Association [ALA] colleague that wasn't he/she aware of the fact that all of these visual presentations reinforced only one thing. The response was that how were individuals supposed to be depicted showing

information? This was about ten years ago and things haven't changed. The seminal role played by books in small and rural libraries is not difficult to grasp. In addition to those things mentioned above, one must consider the tradition of libraries as repositories of books. Librarians have been brought up in this cultural environment. As suggested earlier, while things are changing, the typical rural library has not much money to invest in alternative technological resources to offset its historical image. Additionally, not much time is spent marketing or advertising the diverse services available. As a result, while about 70% of the library users (Vavrek, 1990) heard or saw advertisements about the library over the last year, over 40% of the general public had not (Vavrek, 1993). In context, though, it must be understood that it is difficult to provide much in the way of advertisement if the community has no channels of mass communications, such as, local newspapers, radio stations, etc. This, of course, does not preclude producing the usual brochures and mailers that could be distributed widely in grocery stores, through churches, etc.

As a corollary to the above concern about the lack of advertising, it is of some significance to know that half of the nonusers studied by Vavrek (1993) indicated that they were not familiar with any of the library's services with the exception of books, magazines, and newspapers. Perhaps it is not surprising that half of the American public does not use the public library because of a perceived lack of time and that there is no need (Estabrook, 1991; Vavrek, 1993).

Seventh, the next item that this author would like to offer for consideration is particularly significant. Seventy percent of the users of nonmetropolitan public

libraries are women. Further, while the percentage has not been as dramatic, user studies of public libraries, in general, have always shown that females outnumber male users (Knight & Nourse, 1969; Doremus Porter Novelli, 1987). The interesting thing, however, is that in most instances analysts have spent little time considering why the tendency of use has been this way and what it means. The prevailing attitude has appeared to include a type of casualness, and then moving on to something else. While this author certainly does not have a total explanation for this phenomenon of use, perhaps from the mouths of babes we have some interpretation. A few years ago the young daughter of one of our research associates suggested that it was easy to understand why the local public library appears to be a place for women. "Usually, the librarian is a woman; there are only restrooms for women; the story hour is directed by a woman; there are mostly romance books in the library; and when the library has a fund-raiser, the prize is usually a quilt or something else that women like, instead of a fishing rod." Although this previous interpretation may not stand the rigors of a research investigation, at the emotional level it reveals at least one perception of life in the country. It is also the author's impression, and not necessarily substantiated by the research literature, that women read more than men (at least the "stuff" currently in the typical library), and that despite an increasing number of women working outside of the household and a growing number of men staying at home, the female member has the continuing responsibility of "educating" children. This includes what are important trips to the library with the kids--for storyhours and beyond. One was secretly amused by listening to the short

conversation between mother and child at the local K-Mart. While the mother was scolding the child, it was with the admonition: "If you don't behave, we won't go the library." Now, that is something to consider.

When the CSRL began reporting that 70% to 80% (Vavrek , 1990, Pennsylvania) of rural library users were women, some colleagues politely suggested that this was attributable to the fact that women were in the library "fetching" things for members of the household. This possibility was considered further and it was determined that only in 28% of the cases were women in the library for reasons other than their own (Vavrek, 1990). It is likely to assume that women will want to support their local public libraries. Whether this situation will continue in the future, should be a matter of great concern to library planners. With more and more women working outside of the home, their level of library use may diminish linearly because of a lack of time. But beyond the role of women as library supporters and users, it is crucial that services be targeted to men. Serious efforts should be made to achieve some parity between men and women. Overall, those responsible for the management of the community's library must strive to consistently broaden the base of supporters for the immediate future. This is the only way to insure both a replacement factor for library users who leave the community (or join it) and the survival of the institution.

Eighth, the implications of technology for those responsible for future planning is inescapably important. Initially, describing technology, of course, involves a continuum of different things--to some it may mean for the first time that the library has a phone or conventional typewriter. One state library colleague, for example,

indicated that librarians were interested in obtaining LSCA funds in his or her state to install a bathroom for the first time in the library. While impoverished libraries continue to be a concern, as noted earlier in a review of financial support, their needs are also changing. Every librarian would love to be a player in the game of technology. Providing sufficient funds to accomplish this is another concern. The situation is definitely improving. Because of the influence of cooperative library ventures, the smallest library is now being included in online catalog access, statewide data bases, Internet connections etc. Inhibiting this growth of the newest technology is a matter that was discussed earlier--educational needs. Typically, the infrastructure to support the daily use of all of the newly applied technology in the library does not exist. Obviously, the situation varies throughout the country, but this author believes that the following example is symptomatic of the situation. In a state that shall remain nameless, library personnel were gathered at various places around the state to receive a program that was being broadcast by satellite. Unfortunately, few of the sites were actually able to receive the program because the satellite coordinates had been altered and individuals simply were unaware of how to go about changing things at the local level. Unless there is a major change of both attitude and implementation, small and rural libraries will not be able to cope with the daily application of technology that is being initiated at warp speed.

To illustrate what is happening on an overall basis with the implementation of technology, the results of a recent preliminary investigation conducted by the CSRL of (n=317) libraries, in populations <25,000, may be of some interest. Preliminary

data suggest that each library responding had at least one personal computer, fax machine, and CD-ROM workstation. While the reported personal computer is used for a variety of tasks, word processing is the most popular. Most libraries report, however, that they spend less than $500 annually for purchase of things pertaining to technology, as, for example, software, CD-ROM applications, and hardware. And not surprisingly, the most limiting factor in acquiring more technology is the lack of funds (Moberly, 1994).

Finally, on the matter of technology, the following may be of some interest. Current national studies indicate that only about a third of the public is interested in accessing databases, making bank transactions, etc., and about 25% are enamored of the idea of using electronic bulletin boards, online shopping, etc. (Personal Computers, 1993). While these views and circumstances may change, it is important to recognize the fact that not everyone may be as supportive of the new technology as we would like to assume or feels that it is needed. Librarians referring to themselves as "cybrarians" may not really bring the information society and cyberspace any closer to the local community.

The ninth, and last topic that this author would like to offer for planning considerations relates to providing library and information services to Native Americans. Among institutions serving rural populations, those on Indian Reservations merit particular attention.

> The Strategic Plan for the Development of Library and Information Services to Native Americans...indicates that the

> lack of coordination among diverse Federal agencies and the lack of overall coordinating leadership has impeded development of Native American library programs. Most States do not include tribal libraries in their statewide library network plans (United States National Commission on Libraries and Information Science [USNCLIS], 1992, p. 12).

The above situation is unfortunate in many ways, particularly in the light of the fact that reservation libraries may be one of the best examples of multi-function facilities. For example, the community college libraries at the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation and the Devil's Lake Sioux Reservation, in North Dakota, function also as public and tribal library libraries. This pattern may be seen in South Dakota, Montana, etc. The USNCLIS has recommended the following challenges for change: 1. Develop consistent funding sources required to support improved Native American library and information services; 2. Strengthen library and information services training and technical assistance to Native American communities; 3. Develop programs to increase tribal library material holdings and to develop relevant collections in all formats; 4. Improve access and strengthen cooperative activities; 5. Develop state and local partnerships; 6. Establish general Federal policy and responsibilities; 7.Identify model programs for Native American libraries and information services; 8. Develop museum and archival services for preserving Native American cultures; 9. Encourage adult and family literacy programs, basic job skills training, and strengthen tribal community colleges; 10. Encourage Application of

newer information network technologies (USNCLIS, 1992, pp. 9-20).

The public's view of Native Americans may be stilted by the recent success that some of the tribes have had at gaming casinos. In these instances, enormous wealth is being realized with a commensurate positive effect on institutional growth (Johnson, 1995). This newly found glamour hides the incidence of poverty, low educational attainment, and social dysfunction that continue to exist on less fortunate reservations. Added to the list of woes, is a recent transplant from the city--the development of gangs (Mydans, 1995).

The Public Library and Adult Services

While the following comment was voiced 45 years ago, it typifies--in this author's view the present status of the public library in efforts at adult education.

> The public library, then, has not become either a major center of formally organized adult education under its own initiative, nor does it serve as the officially designated library for the major agencies of formal adult education. Nevertheless, to the extent its means, in terms of materials and skilled personnel, the libraries provide opportunity for many men and women individually or organized into formal groups to continue their education as adults. In this sense it furnishes the essential library service for the host of activities and efforts which have somewhat romantically been called the peoples' university (Leigh,1950, pp. 107-108).

The above view should not be interpreted as an indictment of the public library, particularly in the light of the fact--as noted earlier--that adult education is far more complicated as a field of inquiry than it might appear to be. Historically, the typical public library has attempted providing a variety of different products and services. These ultimately were conceptualized into three basic types: educational, recreational, and informational. And while the public library has always recognized the adult client as a major benefactor of planning activities, the over the 18 crowd has taken the proverbial back seat to services for children. Unknowingly, (because public librarians have not been very good systematic observers of client use) the library has come to be perceived as a place for children (and women), whose role was discussed earlier. Perhaps, this institutional identity has not been exclusively children oriented, but there is no hiding the fact that summer storyhours for kids and programs for children usually generate enthusiastic lines of young users. Why they do not necessarily maintain that enthusiasm for the library throughout the various stages of adulthood is an issue in need of some thought and investigation.

While services for children have been burgeoning, reinforced by hungry appetites for more, programs articulated for adults, in the past, have frequently generated few takers. Adults, it appears, have other things to do. Viewing movies, reading newspapers and other materials, participating in social organizations and volunteer groups, taking care of families, etc., are among the variety of choices made available to the typical adult. The most enthusiastic librarian sometimes hesitates at the thought of preparing yet another program that reaches few "non-kids." As a

consequence, librarians have backed away from scheduling adult programs. Parenthetically, while this is an atypical example, this author is familiar with an effort at programming where the librarian in charge forgot to attend.

Adding further to this adult programming malaise is the fact, that while library staff members talk about employing marketing techniques in their efforts of identifying constituencies and their needs, they frequently lack the skills of conducting marketing programs. What develops, at best, are sporadic efforts at public relations. And many staff members have never organized any programs. The cost of programming is certainly another wildcard, but librarians have become quit adaptive at budget programming. Clearly, however, objectives can not be accomplished where there literally is no money available.

Despite the historical and present shortcoming associated with efforts to provide adult programming, it would be unfair and inaccurate to conclude that there has been no change over the last 45 years. Quite the contrary. In an effort to quickly update current perceptions about the extent to which public librarians are now providing adult education programming, this author phoned colleagues around the country who are primarily responsible for the management of library cooperatives/consortia. This was not a scientific investigation but rather an effort to take a snapshot of what was occurring. Parenthetically, this author also attempted to gather information from public librarians by sending out a request for information through a popular listserv (a discussion group) on the Internet. Interestingly, there were no electronic responses.

Although reports varied from those individuals contacted by phone, it appears that adult education is a "comer." Public librarians seem to be recognizing the need for expanding adult programming and services, and are "easing in to it." Activities pertaining to everything from great book discussions, computer classes (Adams, 1994), programs intended for business persons (Garrison, 1991), health services (Adams, 1995), events for those anticipating enrolling in programs of higher education, coincidental activities with, for example, Black History Month, literacy services of one kind or another (Rachel 1993; Rodriguez & Tejeda, 1993), travel related events for retired persons/seniors, genealogy (Grice & Hart, 1990), suggest the continuum of different lifelong learning experiences being made available in public libraries around the United States. Additionally, there is also some incidence of lifelong learning services being offered through public libraries for support staff. In this latter example, the technique utilized is teleconferencing. Despite the strides that have been made, it would be appropriate to indicate, however, that it does not appear--as yet--that adult services have taken on the magnitude of replacing children's services as an institutional emphasis. But there is evidence of steady progress. Further, it should be noted that undoubtedly there is additional programming taking place on a national scale that has gone unreported. Rural librarians infrequently report their experiences in the library press.

In relation to offering adult services in cooperation with other community agencies, again, while there is some incidence of this occurring--with literacy agencies, Small Business Development Centers, Cooperative Extension Services--one

does not perceive that the typical community library has an action plan at the local level for this to happen. In the view of this author, there is still a great deal of posturing when individuals talk about cooperation, as opposed to the real thing. Again, one is sanguine about this changing for the better. An interesting example of this has been stimulated by the Arizona State Library that has helped to develop Economic Development Information Centers [EDICs] in public libraries. These, in turn, have initiated cooperative projects with other groups (Miele & Welch, 1995).

Before concluding, the author would like to return to the spirit of Leigh's comment quoted at the beginning of this section pertaining to the supportive role that public librarians play in relation, for example, to providing resources for activities orchestrated by other groups. A significant trend with which this author is familiar has to do with the increased use of the local public library by students who are enrolled into programs of higher education--and not necessarily in that community. It appears that these individuals are expecting that the local public library provide course materials needed for their studies. While noted earlier that there has been little dispute about the importance of the public library being a source for educational matters, what is now occurring, however, is the local public library beings asked to act instead of the academic library. This presents an interesting new dilemma on whether or not to defer scarce resources to purchase expensive materials that have a short shelf life.

Truly, the wildcard in all of this effort to assess the present and particularly the future role of the public library as a source for lifelong learning relates to the

ongoing development and application of technology. For example, Bell Atlantic has received permission from the courts to offer video dialtone services, that is, video over phone lines (Landler, 1995), the Internet is developing in such a frenzy the everyone seems to want to have access to it--including the most rural community (Wildstrom, 1994), and personal computer manufacturers have finally succeeded in augmenting the hofne market as never before through multi-media packaging--CD-ROM (Armstrong, 1994).

It is the author's view, however, that communities are no better off with random acts of connectivity, despite how charming or forward looking they may appear, than they were in the past if their is an absence of community action. "...it wouldn't surprise us to see the 'global internet' find one of its best uses is as a low-cost channel for providers to make truly relevant local information available electronically" (Miller, 1995, p. 6). Wilkinson (1992) has expressed the view, however, that technology has both the potential to rescue geographically remote areas from economic and social problems or to break the backs of communities struggling to exist. His major concern is that there is a crisis of community. Rural towns may cease being communities, with the capacity for development and growth, and become nodes on a network. Parenthetically, it is not only rural America that is concerned about its future. Goldberger (1995) in discussing the development of malls in White Plains, New York, comments "But the real issues here [about malls] are not architectural. They involve the notion of public space in our time, and the declining role of cities as we have known them" (p. 28).

Areas of Needed Research

Clearly, this has been a challenging paper because of its scope. Using it as a preface, one would like to suggest the following research agenda for Federal action. Items are listed in order of importance as perceived by this author:

1. What is the present and long-range impact on the people in a rural or small community who have access to the services of a public library? Likewise, what is the impact where there is no library?

2. How much does it add to the success and value of a public library to have available the services of an academically trained librarian?

3. What circumstances would help to overcome the limited availability of academically trained staff in America's public libraries?

4. What perceptions do adults have relative to the public library as a resource for lifelong learning? What are the ingredients for improving library services?

5. What conditions or circumstances would encourage community agencies and institutions to more actively share resources and services? What is the librarian's role as a community leader?

6. In what manner may information services provided for Native Americans be improved?

7. To what extent have rural and small communities utilized electronic information services for improving infrastructure? What models exist?

8. What circumstances would insure that the public library is the focal point of the virtual community?

Conclusions

Historically, the public library movement has developed without a clear and coherent agenda of research activities at the national level. This has been a costly weakness. NIPELLL is to be commended for its leadership role in correcting this long-standing fault. The efforts of Barbara Humes, Leader, Libraries and Community-Based Education Team, are to be particularly complimented.

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